



PREVENTING A MAJOR WILDFIRE CATASTROPHE IN THE BOW VALLEY

SUMMARY

APRIL 2025

The Bow Valley—encompassing Banff National Park, the Town of Banff, Canmore, and MD of Bighorn—is at imminent risk of a catastrophic wildfire. Despite commendable efforts in localized fire prevention (e.g., firebreaks, fireguards, neighbourhood mitigation), it is our opinion **no comprehensive measures are in place to address the risk of an extreme wildfire—the kind that devastated Fort McMurray (2016) and Jasper (2024)**. A fire of that scale in this region would be both a national tragedy and a global environmental disaster.

THE RISK IS REAL AND UNDERESTIMATED

- Fire Hazard: **The forests within the Bow Valley are dense, overgrown, diseased and a lot are dead—ideal conditions for high-intensity crown fires.**
- Limited Protection: **Municipal, Provincial and Parks Canada mitigation focuses on interface protection—not large-scale wildfire prevention.**
- Precedent: Jasper's 2024 fire, despite similar mitigation efforts, overwhelmed defences and caused long-term ecological and economic damage.
- Left unmanaged, Parks can stockpile disease and fuel—feeding fires and disease that can spread far beyond their borders.

LOCAL, REGIONAL, NATIONAL AND GLOBAL CONSEQUENCES

- Human & Economic Impact: Over 20,000 residents, essential infrastructure, tourism revenue, and cultural heritage are at risk. **Massive potential losses to life, property, flora and fauna. Losses in Jasper were almost \$1B and Fort McMurray were \$3.7B. Bow Valley could be even higher.**
- Climate Cost: **In 2023, Canada's wildfires emitted approximately 3 billion tonnes of CO₂**, according to a June 2024 analysis by the World Resources Institute (WRI) and the University of Maryland. This was: **Nearly 4 times the CO₂ emissions of global aviation in 2022, and more than the total historical CO₂ emissions from the Canadian oil sands since the 1960s.** (Source: WRI Report 2024)
- Forests within Park boundaries need to be actively managed, not harvested, by removing dead and diseased trees to reduce wildfire risk and the spread of disease, while leaving more space for healthy trees to flourish.
- Biodiversity Loss: A larger-scale intense fire would cause significant harm to Banff National Park's eco-system.

THE OPPORTUNITY

- Natural Carbon Sink: Managed properly, the Bow Valley's forests could serve as a globally relevant carbon sink.
- Pilot for National Reform: The Bow Valley could demonstrate proactive landscape-scale fuel reduction across all Canadian Provincial and Federal Parks.
- Canada could improve commercial forests by managing on a sustainable basis and increasing our forest cover, absorbing vast amounts of carbon perpetually, creating jobs and investment. Canada has >300 million hectares of forests!
- Public Support: Residents and experts support a shift from reaction to prevention.

CALL TO ACTION FOR OUR FEDERAL CANDIDATES

- Acknowledge the real and rising risk of a CFFDRS* Class 6 wildfire (**Crown fire**, long-range spotting, **generates own weather**, suppression impossible) in the Bow Valley.
- While working with the Province and Indigenous Peoples, support federal investment in a landscape-scale fire mitigation strategy for the Bow Valley.
- Advance policy reform recognizing forests as carbon assets requiring active stewardship.
- Champion this initiative as a model for national wildfire and carbon management.

Leadership now will prevent catastrophe later. We urge you to take a stand—on the record—before disaster makes action too late.

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Backed by community, science, and global responsibility.

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**Canadian Forest Fire Danger Rating System*